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James J. Alexander Rorke, Jr.
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THESE DAYS:

A Disillusioned Freedom Fighter

By JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

NOT SO LONG AGO the report came from Cuba that an American-owned plane had attempted to bomb oil installations in Havana. The bombs, so the report said, had failed to explode. But other reports, coming in from the anti-Castro underground, said a noise had been heard, which would indicate something had been hit.

The plane in question was a twin Beechcraft C-45, piloted by Geoffrey Sullivan, of Waterbury, Conn., and owned—on a still largely unpaid note—by a handsome Irishman named Alexander Rorke Jr., who boasts he was the first American reporter to be jailed by Castro. Though nobody had seen the plane take off from any point that would have indicated an infringement of the neutrality laws, the U. S. government grabbed the Beechcraft in Connecticut the other day. It is now held at Bradley Field, near Hartford, and its owner can't reclaim it, though he insists it was seized without a warrant and that no charges have been preferred against him.



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The loss of the plane is the second serious setback which Mr. Rorke, a dedicated anti-Communist who wants to help the Cubans get rid of Castro, has encountered in recent weeks. Before his troubles with the plane, he had lost his boat, the Violynn III, which was kept by the U. S. from using Norman's Key, an island in the Bahamas, as a possible base for raids against Cuban ships. The Violynn III was permitted by the British to return to Dinner Key, Fla., where it was seized by the Coast Guard.

Now held by the U. S. Customs in the Miami River, the Violynn III is, according to Mr. Rorke, "rotting" because of the salt that is backing up into its exhaust, and "ruining" the manifolds. Mr. Rorke insists, once again, that no charges have been preferred against him for violating any laws of the United States with the Violynn III.

The government, obviously, thinks it has good reason to sequester the Beechcraft and the Violynn III, and maybe it has. But, regardless of the technical legal rights and wrongs of the case, what makes Mr. Rorke particularly angry is the invasion of what he considers to be his moral rights as a dedicated freedom fighter.

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SETTLE at a luncheon table this week and letting the food grow cold, Mr. Rorke spoke of what he considers to be the double standard involved in application of the neutrality laws. Only yesterday, he said, the U. S. was conducting anti-Castro leaflet raids and

this, he said, for Cubans, but the tab for the raids was, as he put it, "picked up by the C. I. A." which would indicate that the raids had been approved by a U. S. government agency.

What Mr. Rorke wants to know is why it is right to break a law at one time and wrong to break it at another. Before 1963, he said, the U. S. government was itself involved in violating the neutrality legislation in regard to Cuba. But today it is deemed illegal even when anti-Castro Cuban patriots mount their raids against Cuba from Central America or some uninhabited rock in the Caribbean.

What bothers Mr. Rorke is that the crackdown on the Cubans seems, inferentially, to condemn much of the U. S. heroic past. If anti-Castro Cubans are to be kept from fighting Castro, he says, then General Claire Chennault of Louisiana was wrong to have organized the Flying Tigers to help the Chinese fight the Japanese in the days before Pearl Harbor. And it was wrong for American fliers to have enlisted in the Eagle Squadron to fight the Nazis for the British.

Beyond that, Mr. Rorke recalls the time when Raoul Lufbery of Wallingford, Conn., helped organize the Lafayette Escadrille to carry out air missions against the Germans in World War I. This was before the U. S. had formally entered the war.

It is Mr. Rorke's contention that any American citizen should have the blessing of his government for enlisting in the war against tyranny anywhere. Americans are fighting against Communists in south-eastern Asia. They are contributing to Israel in its struggle to maintain its territorial integrity against the Arab states. Why, then, discriminate against an American freedom fighter for choosing Castro as his target? Mr. Rorke wants to know.